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Official Records

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Wednesday, 23 September 1998, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Hurricane in the Dominican Republic

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I wish to inform representatives that owing to reasons of *force majeure*, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic will speak today at the end of this afternoon's meeting, as his country has just been struck by a strong hurricane that has caused tremendous human and material losses. The hurricane has also affected other countries of the region, such as Haiti and possibly even Cuba. The reason for this schedule change is of a humanitarian nature and explains the situation as well as the Minister's need to return to his country as soon as possible.

I appeal to members for understanding in this respect, and I trust that we can express our solidarity in this way. We will also be conveying, through the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, our sympathy and our wish to cooperate with that country.

Address by Mr. Andrés Pastrana Arango, President of the Republic of Colombia

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Colombia.

Mr. Andrés Pastrana Arango, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Colombia, His Excellency Mr. Andrés Pastrana Arango, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Pastrana Arango (*interpretation from Spanish*): Mr. President, as I address the Assembly for the first time as President of Colombia, I should like to offer you, on behalf of my Government, our warmest congratulations on being elected to guide our debates during this session.

A few weeks ago, the most important democratic elections in Colombia's recent history took place. Despite the problems that have besieged our nation in the last few years, our institutional structure has faced one of the sternest tests ever and has again shown that it is solid. In June, more than 12 million people — one of the highest electoral turnouts in the history of the Republic — expressed their free, spontaneous and conscious choice.

Today, Colombia is looking towards new horizons. We have restored confidence in our country. We have started the changes which will enable us to face our internal problems with determination and which will win us a more positive and dynamic place in the international community.

Our most urgent task will be to build for peace. That is the unshakable commitment of my Government

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and the heartfelt desire of all of the Colombian people. We are aware that any process designed to root out the causes of conflict for all time will be highly complex. But all our efforts will be dedicated to this noble goal, and we will strive for it tirelessly.

It is for this reason that I have personally taken the lead in building peace. We are working hard on the preparation of an agenda for this purpose. We are convinced that representatives of all sectors of society should play a part, and that at the end of the road we will find a guiding light that will lead our country again to peaceful coexistence. Peace in Colombia will also be founded on a clear strategy for economic development and a bold policy for social justice. Only in this way will it be possible to forge a fruitful and lasting peace.

As we travel the road to peace the support of the international community will complement our own efforts.

We will advocate respect for fundamental rights and full application of international humanitarian law among all those involved in conflict. We will learn from the valuable experiences of other countries in the solution of internal conflicts, and we will adopt whatever is applicable and appropriate to our own situation.

Peace in Colombia will demand very substantial investments in social sectors and infrastructure in the zones of conflict. For this, we will create a "Peace Fund". A significant portion of the money required will come from internal sources. We will also be looking for contributions from the international community, from which we have already received expressions of encouragement, solidarity and interest.

All these actions will be part of what we have termed "diplomacy for peace". It will be diplomacy with social and economic content. It will be diplomacy expressed in investment and in the mobilization of human, technical and financial resources, so that our peace will have a firm and lasting foundation.

The achievement of peace in Colombia will be an important initial contribution to the liberation of mankind from one of the twentieth century's greatest evils: the global problem of illicit drugs. To the extent that we can find agricultural alternatives for our peasant farmers, with fair prices for their products at home and abroad, they will become less dependent on illicit crops. The support of the international community will be crucial in this. The eradication of illicit crops will be one of the central elements of the peace talks that we intend to undertake with the groups engaged in armed conflict.

It is true that the end of East-West confrontation brought into being a system of international relations based on *détente* and on a decline in the role that military power had played during the cold war. The spectre of a nuclear cataclysm seemed to have vanished, and all humanity embraced new hopes for the future.

It was thought that the end of the cold war would be the salvation of the many countries and the millions of people who had been forgotten in the midst of tensions and feuds between the two superpowers. But now, almost 10 years later, those initial expectations are far from becoming a reality. Ethnic and religious rivalries, regional confrontations and grave new threats to peace have emerged.

I must say most clearly that my Government and the people of Colombia absolutely reject all kinds and modes of terrorism, whatever their origin or motive. There can be no truce with terrorism. All States must fight together to defeat it. This is surely one of our greatest challenges.

Corruption is buffeting democracy in a growing number of countries and is becoming a cause of political and social breakdown. Illicit drugs continue to be one of the worst scourges of today's society, bringing irreparable harm to the new generations and, therefore, to the future of humanity.

Human rights are still not properly respected. Women are still the target of abuse and discrimination. Children are the victims of disgraceful practices. Fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the more vulnerable groups often have no access to the protection that States are obliged to provide for them.

Unsustainable consumer and production practices still continue. The planet's natural resources are being depleted, its biological wealth is being looted, and our rivers and oceans are being contaminated. Poverty continues to affect huge segments of society. Economic growth in some countries and the prosperity of some levels of society contrast dramatically with the marginalization suffered by the majority of the world's population.

This situation is occurring in an international environment in which the right to development is

indissolubly linked to the existence of a favourable international climate. We are going through the most serious financial crisis since the end of the cold war, but there does not yet seem to be sufficient clarity and political will to face it and overcome it.

All Latin America has voiced its concern at the gravity of the crisis. Its origins are outside our region, in which countries have made structural reforms to achieve healthy economies that will enable them to meet the social expectations of their peoples.

We are aware of the risk of a world recession, and we consider it essential that the more developed countries, the Group of Seven and the international financial organs adopt suitable measures to prevent any new collapse. Such a disaster would irreversibly affect the developing countries first. The measures should enable the financial markets to recover their stability and provide a rapid solution to the current crisis in the world economy that has caused so much concern.

Among the proposals which Colombia made at the San Francisco Conference and which were included in the United Nations Charter, there are two I would now like to mention, because they belong to the common heritage of our foreign policy: first, compliance in good faith with the obligations assumed by the Member States of the United Nations, as an underlying assumption for the validity of its universal action; and secondly, recognition of the role played by regional arrangements and agencies in the maintenance of peace, in international security as an integrated concept and in the peaceful settlement of disputes between States.

Colombia believes that universalism and regionalism are complementary and should support each other harmoniously. Therefore, one of the aims of our diplomacy is to strengthen the regional agencies within the concept of universalism. It is thus essential that we join our efforts to regain the momentum achieved on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the birth of the United Nations, so that the Organization will be revitalized and ready for the beginning of a new millennium.

The various levels of action required are all based on the credibility of the multilateralism which the United Nations embodies and the trust which our peoples have in it. Some support the approval of certain reforms that the experience of this period of history and the changes on the world scene have in themselves made imperative. The United Nations cannot be expected to possess magic formulas that we ourselves do not have for solving problems and situations that concern us all, within the context of the interdependence and internationalization characteristic of our times. But we certainly need to adapt them to this moment in history, when we face such wide horizons and colossal challenges. We need something of the idealism and pragmatic spirit which could be inspired by solidarity among the human race.

The reasons for the creation of the United Nations not only remain intact, but also have rapidly even become more relevant in the second half of the twentieth century. The principles which inspired its creation have become so important that any action taken unilaterally or by a group of States turns out to be inadequate or limited in effect. Therefore, it will be useful to identify what we can do to make the proposed reforms truly worthwhile. One must seek a genuine consensus for the agenda of priorities for the new millennium.

Colombia is ready to help reconcile existing disputes. This is not a question of a simple, formal agreement or of a quest for utopian reform, but of a meeting of wills and a methodical and open-minded consensus regarding proposals which are designed to bring us closer to an era of greater justice and balance.

We must eliminate the contradiction in which more responsibilities, actions and programmes are demanded from the United Nations while at the same time some States fail to meet their obligations or do not show any willingness to increase their contribution in proportion to their capacity. Without doubt, the United Nations must be properly funded. The adaptation of structures, regulations and modes of operation means that the Organization must have the personnel and the funds it needs, through efficient and exemplary management.

Cooperation for development must receive a massive injection to save it from decline, and this must be in accordance with the text and spirit of the Charter and of countless commitments, within an overall concept that includes encouragement of respect for human, individual, social, economic and cultural rights.

My Government has a policy of encouraging broader participation by the new actors on the international stage, such as non-governmental organizations and the private sector. New sources of funding for certain social, development and humanitarian programmes should be sought, which should extend the scope of action of the United Nations and ensure that it

continues to steer the common course of international solidarity.

We need multilateralism with social content, in which the human being is the central priority and in which development is the guiding principle in decisions. I stand before you to appeal to all nations to contribute to the burial of the post-cold-war period, to see it as no more than an interregnum, and to open the door wide to an era of creative and more humane multilateralism.

The original principles of the Organization are of course still valid, but we need to make some adjustments. We need to reconsider certain modes of international action and heed the voices of the peoples who desire development and fight for it in the midst of difficulty and conflict. We need to strengthen communication and dialogue between North and South and to correct unreasonable imbalances.

We believe that the time has come to make an objective review of the present state of negotiations for the reform of the Organization, in order to ensure that social and economic matters are properly related to the legitimate aspirations of developing nations. There must be instruments to encourage rapport between the organs originating from the San Francisco Charter and those institutions born at Bretton Woods.

We know that the responses of individual nations or groups of States are insufficient. Therefore, there is an even more urgent need to coordinate global responses through vigorous multilateralism. There is an obvious dichotomy between de facto globalization, science and technology, instantaneous communications and the world market, on the one hand, and, on the hand, the absence of genuine social order and human advancement.

We must revive an authentic and productive North-South dialogue, based on a concept of solidarity which is more substantial than declarations or good intentions and which is expressed in specific action. It must take account of the needs of the more vulnerable groups and of those excluded from progress. It must replace the logic of confrontation and of the division between poor and rich countries with the logic of cooperation, shared responsibility and solidarity inspired by justice as the golden rule of multilateralism.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II summed up this position perfectly on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, when, addressing this same Assembly, he urged us to unite our efforts to build a civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty, to overcome the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the twentieth century.

We firmly believe that the Charter and all the institutions of the international system must promote dynamic cooperation, each enriching the shared universal heritage with its own particular character.

The United Nations must not be merely a forum for the sovereign expression of States. It must be the place for negotiation and synthesis in the political, cultural, social and economic life of the nations.

It is reassuring to see that the grand designs that inspired the Charter remain valid. It is now our task to maintain them and to interpret the new situations that arise in the course of history.

We know, for example, that conflicts within States are conceptually different from the old wars between States. We have a greater understanding of the link between peace and development and of the way in which politics and socioeconomic interests are related. We believe that it is appropriate to consolidate a minimum international order and to replace violence and terrorism with peace and coexistence, which should then thrive naturally through multilateralism.

Colombia encourages the efforts undertaken in arms control, with the systematic quest for disarmament as the ultimate goal, and supports the priority allocation of world and regional resources to development. We believe that it is therefore essential to make progress in the control and gradual elimination of weapons of mass destruction and to exercise effective control over the illegal arms trade, to which thousands of men, women and children fall victim daily throughout the world, and especially in the developing countries.

We need a realistic and methodical strategy to secure peace in our time and in the coming century. We need to promote monitoring mechanisms for treaty compliance, the negotiated solution of conflicts and the creation of nuclear-free zones with effective verification systems. In this respect, the United Nations will need to perfect early-warning systems to evaluate events so that its actions will be efficient and genuinely preventive.

I have come here today to reaffirm Colombia's unbroken tradition as a nation devoted to the great

principles that underpin the very existence of the United Nations. We are prepared to offer, with thoughtful optimism, our support for the achievement of its purposes and its reforms. We believe it would be useful to review and appraise the results of the various summits held in recent years, so that we may follow up their results and plans of action. This will serve both as a gauge of their effectiveness and as the central element of the analysis of the coordination of the various institutions of the United Nations system as a whole.

Our people rightly demand more effective action and less empty rhetoric. We cannot betray billions of human beings who yearn for a world at peace, with democracy and freedom, and above all just, united and equitable.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Colombia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Andrés Pastrana Arango, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Jules Wijdenbosch, President of the Republic of Suriname

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Suriname.

Mr. Jules Wijdenbosch, President of the Republic of Suriname, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President *(interpretation from Spanish)*: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Suriname, His Excellency Mr. Jules Wijdenbosch, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Wijdenbosch: Before starting my statement, I should like to express, on behalf of my delegation, our sympathy to the victims and their families in the path of the destructive Hurricane Georges through the countries of our region, including Caribbean sister nations. I call upon the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies to render all possible support to the countries and the peoples afflicted.

Allow me to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over our General Assembly at this session. I would also like to express my appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for his important contribution during the last session.

In addition, may I also thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his continuous efforts to transform our United Nations into a more effective instrument for promoting peace and enhancing the well-being of the people of the world as we move into a new millennium.

Mrs. Osode (Liberia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The restructuring of the Security Council with a view to properly reflecting the present international economic and political reality and to meeting the new challenges of the next millennium is of fundamental importance. My delegation believes that the discussions should not be limited to the mere expansion of the Council, but should rather address the improvement of its effectiveness and its adherence to the principle of our Charter that all States are equal. We would like to emphasize that my delegation fully underscores the position taken by the Non-Aligned Movement, most recently at its twelfth summit meeting in Durban, South Africa.

Suriname is pleased with the call by the Secretary-General for greater cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in preventing conflicts. In the western hemisphere, it is mainly the Organization of American States and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which have often demonstrated their capabilities of overcoming seemingly insurmountable hurdles by preventing or ending conflicts between and within member States.

Allow me to raise some matters of equally serious international concern that require urgent attention. A disturbing and despicable phenomenon, which we all must condemn in the strongest terms, is the senseless attacks on and even killing of international civil servants, including United Nations field officers. Since these heroic men and women are contributing to the cause of humanity, crimes committed against them must be treated as crimes against humanity and punished accordingly. Recent terrorist attacks in Africa, Europe and elsewhere have once more shocked the international community and have left us in a state of dismay.

The Republic of Suriname condemns international terrorism and welcomes the conclusion of regional agreements and mutually agreed declarations to combat and eliminate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

My Government deeply deplores the fact that the process for durable peace and reconciliation in the Middle East has again been stalled and the current situation continues the great suffering of the Palestinian people and uncertainty for the people of Israel. We call upon all sides to re-establish mutual confidence and call on the international community to exert every influence on the parties concerned to save the peace process.

It is recognized that the phenomenon of globalization presents a challenge for the Caribbean region, and requires fundamental changes in our economies and in the developmental process of the region, while increasing the risk of marginalization for all vulnerable economies.

In this regard, we share the view that the small Caribbean States should be granted a reasonable period for adjustment to the changing international environment, in order to enable us to improve our competitiveness, and a non-reciprocal preferential system must be maintained during that transition period. This will allow for a more realistic transition, which will eventually facilitate better adaptation of our economies.

More than ever, the interdependence of States has become clear, now that the negative consequences of globalization have recently manifested themselves in a dramatic manner for many of our member States. I therefore make an urgent appeal to all responsible actors involved in the world economy, including the international financial institutions and monetary authorities, to adjust their relevant policies so as to redress the structural, financial and economic imbalances and adverse effects that have risen.

We call upon all nuclear-weapon States to accede to and fully implement the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We are convinced that the new Department for Disarmament and Arms Regulation will bolster the capacity of the United Nations to pursue these objectives, bearing in mind the ruling by the International Court of Justice in July 1996 that the use of, or the threat to use, nuclear weapons is contrary to international humanitarian law.

As we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Suriname wishes to reiterate its commitment to these rights. At the same time, my Government holds the view that it is equally important not to focus our attention solely on the fulfilment of civil and political rights; we should also focus on the fulfilment of the social and economic rights of our peoples.

It is in this respect that Suriname believes that the implementation of the "Right of Development", in particular for peoples in the developing world, must be given equal attention by the international community. What should be stressed in this context is that human rights and sustainable human development are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The promotion of human rights is, indeed, of particular relevance in a globalized world, with its potential to marginalize the weak and small States, particularly those with limited resources.

Suriname takes part in the General Assembly debate with a sense of pride, since it has demonstrated to the world its acceptance of responsibility for the protection of the environment by preserving one of the most pristine forests on this globe for conservation purposes. My country has recently created the Central Suriname Nature Reserve, comprising 1.6 million hectares and 12 per cent of the territory of the Republic of Suriname. This nature reserve, one of the largest nature reserves in South America and possibly the single most pristine tropical area on Earth, is our gift to humankind for eternity. I consider this gift a special contribution to, among other things, the safeguarding of one of the fundamental human rights of the world population, namely, the right to life. We hope that other nations will follow this example and commit themselves to the protection of the forests of our world.

The information superhighway facilitates the exchange of information and can also contribute to the development and the promotion of public awareness worldwide. However, I must also express my sincere concern about the possible negative consequences of the misuse of this form of technology, which could have adverse effects on all strata of our communities, including our youth. It deserves serious consideration to develop and implement legislative measures to prevent any form of misuse of this form of technology, without in any respect jeopardizing the fundamental right of free expression.

As a result of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, devoted to the world drug problem,

Suriname is now in the final stage of organizing a subregional conference on the drug problem, the aim of which is to establish a plan of action in cooperation with Guyana, Venezuela, Brazil and France, in order to effectively combat this form of organized crime.

Finally, I am pleased to conclude that since our last Assembly reform of our Organization has been well on its way, with a renewed emphasis on economic, social and development activities, and the need to implement its mission of peace, development and human rights in a more effective manner.

We must continue to revitalize the United Nations, since it is our universal instrument for concerted action in the pursuit of our noble aim of the betterment of humankind. It bears repeating, again and again, that the majority of the key conflicts in the world, and the threats to the world community, can only be solved or averted through the strengthening of our multilateral mechanism.

The United Nations must be that mechanism. Our combined political will should be its new life; a new life for the challenges of the new millennium.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of Suriname for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Jules Wijdenbosch, President of the Republic of Suriname, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

Address by The Honourable Mr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minster of the Republic of Mauritius

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius.

The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, His Excellency The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Ramgoolam (Mauritius): Our presence here today is, for my delegation and my country, cause for some celebration. This is the thirtieth anniversary of our first participation in the General Assembly. Upon the attainment of our independence in 1968, the father of the nation, the then Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, addressed the United Nations.

I join the speakers before me in congratulating Mr. Opertti on his assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

I would also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, for the manner in which he conducted the work of the previous session.

I wish to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his wise leadership and vision, which have been a source of renewed confidence in the future of this Organization. We welcome his efforts to lead a reformed and more effective United Nations into the twenty-first century to better carry out our mission of peace, development and human rights. We wish to assure him of our total support in the continuation of the reform process.

We are alive to the intense debate on the reform of the Security Council. We reiterate our position that the Security Council should be enlarged and made more democratic and representative. In this respect, we reaffirm our commitment to the stand taken by the Non-Aligned Movement at the recent Summit in Durban.

In recent years the world has been profoundly transformed by the powerful forces of globalization and liberalization.

All countries are now inextricably linked as distances between them become increasingly immaterial through great leaps in information technology and communications.

The tremors triggered by the crises of the South-East Asian economies and, more recently, the turmoil in the world financial markets have shown in a dramatic way the dangers of the contagion effect. Even those countries which are trying to be efficient and competitive face the possibility of external shocks because of the volatility of capital markets.

I believe that the world community should devise creative and effective mechanisms to prevent emerging economies which have put in hard work from losing the fruits of liberalization.

We must not go back to the inward-looking strategies of the 1960s. We must continue to open our economies, but with greater caution.

This is a great challenge for a large majority of nations, particularly the least developed ones. We know only too well that a number of developing countries are among the most vulnerable and are not yet ready to integrate into the global economy.

When I last addressed this Assembly, I dwelled at some length on the generally grim situation in Africa, which remains one of the most intractable challenges to the world community. It is a continent rich in natural resources and yet afflicted by widespread poverty.

Peace and development in Africa have been, for more than a decade, the subject of endless debates and resolutions at the United Nations. But we know that sustainable development in Africa is conditional upon the achievement of a strife-free continent. It is sad indeed that year after year the number of potential flashpoints seems to grow more numerous. The situation in many regions of Africa remains a cause for great concern.

The peoples of the continent can ill afford the pointless strife and violence visited upon them at a time when the priorities should be economic and social development.

We in Africa naturally have to bear the primary responsibility for assuring lasting peace for our peoples. This is precisely what the leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are striving to achieve.

In his statement to this Assembly, on Monday, President Nelson Mandela, current Chairman of SADC, mentioned the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This difficult problem figured prominently on the agenda of the summit which Mauritius hosted a few days ago, after it was addressed earlier by the Victoria Falls meeting and the Pretoria special SADC summit.

I wish to renew here our appeal to all parties involved in this conflict to solve their differences peacefully through political dialogue and diplomacy. In the Indian Ocean region to our immediate southwest, Mauritius is participating fully in the efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and of the countries of that region to seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis facing the Comoros on account of separatist activities by a group on the island of Anjouan. Mauritius fully supports the unity and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of the Comoros.

Fortunately, however, all is not gloom when we survey Africa. We note with satisfaction the continuous positive economic growth that most sub-Saharan countries have enjoyed lately.

I had the privilege to participate in a round table together with the Deputy President of South Africa earlier this year, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, on the new competitive Africa. The consensus was that Africa stands at the threshold of a new era — an era of opportunity and dynamism. We are at the dawn of an African renaissance.

Governments in Africa are becoming increasingly democratic and responsive, putting more emphasis on economic development, greater openness, market-oriented policies and greater economic reform.

Regional cooperation is another positive feature of the new Africa, working through groupings such as SADC, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to facilitate cross-border trade leading to the ultimate establishment of an African Economic Community.

But for Africa to realize its full potential, several serious constraints will have to be overcome.

The international economic environment should be made less hostile to Africa. Africa's shares of world trade and foreign direct investment still remain at a paltry level.

The debt burden has become in itself a crippling factor and needs urgently to be alleviated.

We also cannot sufficiently emphasize the importance of official development assistance in this regard. We therefore deeply deplore the decline in the levels of official development assistance among the major donor countries. Today, they stand at a historical low. We are now, more than ever, far off the target of 0.7 per

cent of gross national product recommended by this Assembly. This trend must be reversed.

Mauritius took the initiative recently of highlighting the specificities of small island economies in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the negotiations of a successor agreement to the Lomé IV Convention. As a result, recent ministerial declarations adopted by both the WTO and the OAU now contain explicit references to small economies and their high vulnerability. This reality is now gaining recognition within the Bretton Woods institution.

For the reasons I have just mentioned, small economies require time and space to adjust to the new world trade order. We therefore reiterate the need for the maintenance of non-reciprocal trade regimes until such a time as we are adequately prepared.

The Lomé Convention is a model of North-South cooperation. The proposed United States African Growth and Opportunity Act could become another. Together with the other members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), we would like to reaffirm our total support for its passage.

Mauritius has always accorded the highest priority to regionalization to break out of its insularity and enlarge its economic base. Mauritius was a major player in launching, 15 years ago, the Indian Ocean Commission and, more recently, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation.

The Assembly will appreciate that an island State like Mauritius would be interested in the protection of the marine environment. We recommend for the particular attention of the General Assembly the report of the Independent World Commission on the Oceans, according to which the very survival of the human race over the long term is jeopardized by the abuses to which the world's oceans are subjected.

We have to address as a matter of priority the three most immediate dangers identified by the Commission: the overexploitation of marine biological resources, the dumping of toxic waste and the harmful effects of global warming. While much has been achieved since the Rio Earth Summit, we deplore the fact that the initial momentum and urgency appear to have been lost in sterile and fractious debate. I urge that we address these questions, on which our very survival depends, with renewed earnestness and a greater sense of shared responsibility.

(*spoke in French*)

In December we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption and proclamation by this Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For us, that will also provide an opportunity to recall another milestone in the history of human rights: the adoption by the French Constituent Assembly of the declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen more than two centuries ago.

At this historic moment, we wish to recall the preamble of the Charter of our Organization, which proclaims our

> "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

We also reaffirm our profound belief in the equality of all rights — social, economic and cultural, as well as civil and political. Today, Governments can no longer flout the rights of their citizens without being subjected to the censure of the international community. Yet millions of inhabitants of many parts of the world remain deprived of their fundamental rights by oppressors and tyrants who govern by force. We have observed with horror the atrocious crimes against the dignity and worth of the human being committed during recent conflicts. My Government therefore welcomes the recent adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

(*spoke in English*)

My Government believes that respect for human rights is but one facet of the indispensable foundation of the harmonious development of a country. Democracy and transparent and accountable government, as well as effective participation by civil society, are the other essential ingredients for successful development. Considering the complex sociocultural and ethnic mix of our population, we have taken great care to ensure that all our citizens, regardless of their origins or gender, have equal access to education, adequate health care, proper housing and employment opportunities. We will soon introduce in our own National Assembly a protection of human rights bill, which will provide for

the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission.

At the continental African level, participants at the Third Conference of African Women Parliamentarians, which Mauritius was privileged to host, adopted the Port Louis Declaration, calling for increased political commitment at all levels for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. We in Mauritius are taking legislative measures to translate our commitment into practical reality.

We have now become even more aware of the need to seek global solutions to our common problems. Climate change, illicit drug-trafficking and terrorism are problems which require a coordinated international approach. No nation can live under a dome, with its climate isolated from the rest of the world. No country can on its own fight international drug traffickers or terrorism. We therefore condemn unequivocally all forms of terrorism and call for enhanced international cooperation to combat and prevent its occurrence.

While social, economic and trade matters are increasingly — and with good reason — occupying centre stage in international forums, crucial problems of security and disarmament continue to retain their capacity to derail our efforts for development.

Earlier this year we were reminded of the dangers for humanity of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the attendant risks of a new arms race. No country can feel genuinely secure as long as the threat of nuclear weapons exists from any quarter. In this respect, we welcome the stand taken by both India and Pakistan in exercising self-restraint. We reiterate our position that any international instrument for the elimination of nuclear arsenals should be non-discriminatory in nature. Security for all will be achieved only when that threat is completely eliminated. Global nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction must remain our ultimate goal.

Finally, as on past occasions, we would like to bring up once more before this Assembly our lasting claim on the sovereignty of two territories which were taken from our patrimony: the island of Tromelin and the Chagos archipelago. We reiterate our call to the former colonial Powers to enter into constructive bilateral dialogue with my Government for the early restoration of those territories to the sovereignty of Mauritius.

Regarding the Chagos archipelago, this Assembly should also be reminded that some 1,500 inhabitants — the so-called "Illois" — were coerced to leave their homeland to clear the way for a military base. Most of the families, who had lived for generations on these islands, were moved to the main island of Mauritius, victims of the then prevailing cold war. Today, after more than 30 years, they still experience tremendous difficulties adapting to their present conditions. Many yearn to be resettled on these islands. As we are about to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of this century's seminal document on human rights, we consider that we owe it to these Illois to fully re-establish their rights, including the right of return.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius for the statements he has just made.

The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, His Excellency Mr. Tang Jiaxuan, on whom I now call.

Mr. Tang Jiaxuan (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): I wish to congratulate Mr. Opertti on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its current session. I believe that his wisdom and experience will enable him to accomplish his important mission with distinction.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the contribution made by Mr. Udovenko as President of the General Assembly during the previous session.

At present, the international situation is undergoing profound changes. The accelerated trend towards multipolarity has injected new vitality into international relations. Economic globalization is developing very quickly, and countries are becoming increasingly interdependent. The development of multipolarity and globalization has provided a stimulus to the readjustment of international relations.

The President returned to the Chair.

Bilateral partnerships, mainly characterized by non-confrontation, non-alignment and non-targeting against

third countries, have been established one after another. Various regional and intercontinental organizations of cooperation have become more active than ever before. Such endeavours to seek the establishment of stable, pragmatic and balanced international relations contribute to peace and development as well as to the establishment of a fair and equitable new international political and economic order.

However, we cannot lose sight of the many uncertainties still existing in the world.

The nuclear arms race is a product of the cold war. In the post-cold-war period of today, the people of all countries call fervently for the prevention of nuclear proliferation and endeavours for nuclear disarmament.

It is to be regretted that last May India conducted nuclear tests, going against the tide of the times, thus adversely affecting peace and stability in South Asia.

Soon afterwards, Pakistan, too, conducted nuclear tests. Their nuclear tests not only led to an escalation of the tension between the two countries, but also dealt a heavy blow to international nuclear disarmament and the mechanism for the prevention of nuclear proliferation. This has aroused the great concern of the international community. We hope that India and Pakistan will fully implement the Joint Communiqué of the five permanent members of the Security Council, as well as the provisions of Security Council resolution 1172 (1998), give up their plans to develop nuclear weapons and immediately and unconditionally accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We appeal to India and Pakistan to resolve the dispute over the issue of Kashmir through peaceful means.

In our view, following the nuclear tests in South Asia, the international community faces the pressing task of consolidating and strengthening the international non-proliferation mechanism to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons and enhance the universality and authority of the NPT.

China has all along stood for the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. Back in 1994, the Chinese Government proposed to the General Assembly that a treaty on the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons should be concluded through negotiations. Furthermore, the Chinese Government has on many occasions called on all the other nuclear States to undertake not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear States and nuclear-free zones, has proposed the conclusion of a convention on no first use of nuclear weapons through negotiations and has called for the early negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty. China was active in the negotiations on the CTBT and was among the first to sign the Treaty. Today, I would like to reiterate on behalf of the Chinese Government that China will abide by the provisions of the Treaty and has no intention of resuming nuclear testing. China will continue to pursue the policies of unconditional no first use of nuclear weapons and unconditional no use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear States and nuclear-free zones and will continue to support the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to negotiate and conclude a non-discriminatory and verifiable fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of the agreed mandate. China urges the countries with the largest nuclear arsenals to accelerate their nuclear disarmament process. As to the question of the ultimate complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, China, as a nuclear State, will never shirk its responsibility.

The East Asian financial crisis that broke out in July 1997 has caused a sharp decline in the economies of many countries of the region. Its negative impact is still spreading. The drastic devaluation of the Japanese yen since last June has added to the difficulty of economic recovery in the region.

The crisis occurred in the overall context of economic globalization, and its impact is being felt across the world. Stepping up international cooperation and putting an early end to this crisis is not only in the immediate interests of the East Asian countries, but also in the interests of the international community as a whole, and especially of the developed countries. We hope that those developed countries with important influence on the region's economy will shoulder their responsibilities and take active, resolute and effective measures to make their due contributions to safeguarding the stability of the financial order and promoting the recovery and development of the region's economy.

Following the eruption of the East Asian financial crisis, the Chinese Government has taken a highly responsible attitude. China has rendered assistance to the countries concerned within the framework arranged by International Monetary Fund and, at the same time, through bilateral channels. Proceeding from the overall interests of maintaining the stability and development of the region, China has made the decision not to devalue

the yuan renminbi, for which we have endured great pressure and paid a heavy price. Now, despite the growing pressure and risk facing us, our decision to maintain the stability of the yuan renminbi will remain unchanged.

Fighting with one heart and one mind, we won the battle against the disastrous floods. We have taken a series of measures to deepen our reform and expand domestic demand so as to ensure the sustained growth of our economy and achieve the objective of an 8 per cent rise in this year's gross domestic product. We firmly believe that with the common efforts of the countries in the region and of the rest of the international community, the East Asian economy will be able to gradually get out of its predicament and return to the road of sound development.

The Middle East peace process has been in a stalemate for some time, which has aroused widespread concern in the international community. We are of the view that the Arab nations and Israel should hold earnest and pragmatic negotiations so as to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, which will be not only in the fundamental interests of the Arab and Israeli peoples, but also conducive to world peace and stability. We hope that all the parties concerned in the Arab-Israeli disputes will take a flexible and pragmatic position to promote steady progress in the peace negotiations under the principle of land for peace and on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the agreements already reached. The Chinese Government will, as always, support the Middle East peace process and the efforts made by the United Nations and the relevant parties to this end.

We are following the developments in the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia with concern. It is our hope that the parties involved will solve the problem through political dialogue. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia should be respected. Peace and stability in the Balkans have been hard won and should be cherished all the more by the relevant parties and by the international community.

The border conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are another source of concern for us. It is hoped that they will be appropriately resolved by the parties involved through peaceful means.

The twenty-first century is greeting us. On the threshold of the new century, the United Nations bears heavy responsibilities with regard to maintaining world peace, promoting human progress and establishing a just and rational new international political and economic order. It has an irreplaceable role to play. Above all, after the end of the cold war, the United Nations, with fewer constraints and more vitality, is confronted with unprecedented opportunities. In this context, the United Nations should and can use its own advantages to play a unique and constructive role in building a peaceful, secure and stable world, in establishing a new type of international relationship based on friendship and cooperation and in taking up the common challenges facing mankind.

China has consistently held that it is necessary to carry out appropriate reform in the United Nations so that the Organization can better keep abreast of the changing situation and serve its numerous Member States. We have taken note of the initial progress of United Nations reform in a number of fields promoted by all Member States. Some reform measures and recommendations proposed by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, have been approved by the General Assembly and are now being put into practice. Intense discussions on reform of the Security Council are also in orderly progress. At present, there are still differences among Member States on quite a few issues involved in the reform of the Security Council. We hope that all parties will adopt a constructive approach and play an active part in the relevant consultations with a view to reaching a proper settlement of relevant issues.

Here, I wish to reiterate the basic position of the Chinese Government on these issues. First, the reform of the Security Council bears on the interests of all countries and so requires a democratic style of work and extensive and full consultations. All Member States should have an equal right to speak on the question of the reform, and their reasonable proposals should be fully reflected.

Secondly, the Security Council is not a club of rich countries. The purpose of its reform is not just to meet the concerns of a few big countries. Rather, more attention should be given to the interests and aspirations of the vast number of developing countries. Representation should be balanced between the developed and the developing countries.

Thirdly, the reform measures are of major significance, as they bear on enhancing the role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security. They should be worked out on the basis of the realities and in the light of history. It is a matter of course that the objective of the reform of the Security

Council is to solve problems rather than to create new sources of discord. In order to ensure that the reformed Security Council gains extensive support from Member States, it is essential to adhere to the principle of consensus.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the past 50 years, the Declaration has vigorously promoted the advancement and development of the cause of human rights in the world. Vast numbers of people in Asia, Africa and Latin America freed themselves from colonial rule. The South African people rooted out the dark system of apartheid, won basic political rights and became an equal member of the international community. The United Nations, for its part, adopted a series of international instruments on human rights such as the Declaration on the Right to Development, further enriching the content of human rights. The right to development has been universally recognized in the international community as an inseparable part of basic human rights.

In the meantime, earth-shaking changes have taken place in China. Especially in the past two decades, since the introduction of reform and opening up, China has witnessed an ever-improved practice of democracy, an ever-improved legal system and ever-enhanced legal protection of the rights of its people. It is perfectly obvious that the Chinese people now enjoy a higher degree of freedom and equality than ever before and a much fuller and more settled life than in the past. The Chinese Government will continue to make unremitting efforts to advance democracy and to strengthen the legal system, while developing the economy so as to better ensure that its people enjoy human rights to the full.

The Chinese Government is active in supporting and participating in the activities of the United Nations in the field of human rights. China has all along stood for international cooperation in the field of human rights on the basis of equality and mutual respect, so as to enhance understanding, narrow differences, expand common ground and strengthen cooperation through dialogue. The Chinese Government is ready to engage in dialogue, exchanges and cooperation, on the basis of equality and mutual respect, with human rights organizations at the national and international levels.

Last October, the Chinese Government signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. As to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, I earnestly declare here that the Chinese Government has decided to sign it early next month. This once again testifies to the resolve of the Chinese Government with respect to promoting and protecting human rights. China is ready to continue to work with other countries to maintain and increase the current positive momentum of dialogue and cooperation so as to promote the furtherance of the world cause of human rights.

This year is the twentieth anniversary of the introduction of the policy of reform and opening up in China. In these two decades, China has scored tremendous achievements in its reform, opening up and modernization drive. Particularly in recent years, our national economy has gained a favourable momentum of high growth and low inflation, thanks to deepened reforms and strengthened macroeconomic regulation. Last September, the Communist Party of China, at its fifteenth National Congress, formulated a blueprint for China's cross-century development based on the new developments both on the domestic and international scene. In March this year, our new State institutions and new Government were formed through elections at the first session of the ninth National People's Congress of China. We will build energetically on our political and economic restructuring and carry forward the cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics into the twenty-first century in a comprehensive way.

China's modernization drive requires a stable international environment of peace. China will continue to pursue its independent foreign policy of peace. This policy is sustained by three pillars: to persist in independence and maintain the initiative, to safeguard world peace, and to seek common development.

To persist in independence and maintain the initiative, we always put our State sovereignty and national security first and never develop relations with other countries at the expense of our own sovereignty.

Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's sacred territory. The successful return of Hong Kong and the upcoming return of Macao will undoubtedly provide useful inspiration and create favourable conditions for the settlement of the Taiwan question. We will, as always, adhere to the basic policy of peaceful reunification and one country/two systems; adhere to President Jiang Zemin's eight-point proposal on developing cross-Strait relations and promoting the process of peaceful reunification of the motherland; expand cross-Strait exchanges and cooperation in various fields; and

resolutely oppose the creation of the "independence of Taiwan", "two Chinas" and "one China/one, Taiwan" and Taiwan's attempt to re-enter the United Nations.

We respect the sovereignty of other countries and vigorously support the efforts of all countries in the world, and of developing countries in particular, to defend their State sovereignty, while firmly safeguarding our own. In handling international relations, we adhere to non-alignment, non-confrontation and the non-targeting of Third States. We do not go in for military blocs and the arms race, nor do we engage in military expansion. China's development will not pose a threat to any other country. The so-called "China threat" is entirely unfounded and fabricated with ulterior motives.

To safeguard world peace, China is a staunch force for the maintenance of world peace and regional stability. It is our consistent view that State-to-State relations should be handled in a spirit of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, transcending differences in social systems and ideologies. Countries should safeguard their own interests and, at the same time, respect those of others and continuously expand mutually beneficial cooperation by seeking the convergent points of common interests. With regard to existing differences and disputes, it is necessary to persist in dialogue, not engage in confrontation, and strive to settle them by peaceful means rather than by resorting to force or the threat of force.

It is essential to completely reject the mentality of the cold war, advocate a new security concept and resolve international and regional security issues through consensus and participation on an equal footing. We in China stand for the equality of all countries, big or small, and for accelerated democratization of international relations. World affairs should be handled through consultation by all countries, and no country should impose its own will on others.

To seek common development, peace is the prerequisite of development and development is the basis of peace. In today's world, where the economy is increasingly globalized, countries must pursue an open policy in order to achieve economic growth. Opening up to the outside world is China's long-standing basic State policy. As a huge emerging market, China will strive to keep abreast of the trend of economic globalization and be even more active in opening up to the world. It is ready to develop trade and expand scientific and technological exchanges with all countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit and in the interest of common progress. It attaches importance to and actively participates in the activities of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (APEC) and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and sets store by the establishment and development of friendly exchanges and cooperation with other global and intercontinental or regional organizations for economic cooperation.

China continues to take a positive attitude towards joining the World Trade Organization (WTO). Thanks to unremitting efforts over a decade, China is already qualified for entry. Regrettably, however, the relevant negotiations have dragged on and on with no decision having been made. China is a developing country, and we can negotiate China's entry into the WTO only on this basis, in accordance with the principle of balancing rights and obligations. It is our hope that the countries concerned will take a practical, fair and flexible attitude, give up excessive demands and work for an early conclusion of the relevant negotiations. China's joining the WTO will benefit all its members and make the multilateral trade mechanism complete and more balanced.

Before I conclude my speech, please allow me to use the forum of the United Nations to brief you on China's flood-fighting and disaster-relief efforts. Owing to such factors as abnormal climate changes this year, catastrophic floods swept along the Yangtze, Nenjiang, Songhua and other rivers of China. The sheer size of the submerged regions, the duration of the floods and the seriousness of the disaster they caused were something rarely seen before. Giving top priority to the protection of people's lives and their safety, the Chinese Government mobilized forces from all sectors across the country and organized millions of soldiers and civilians for an all-out battle against the floods and for disaster relief. Thus, the assaults of flood crests were repelled again and again; the safety of the main dykes, the main transport arteries and major cities along the rivers was ensured; and the loss of life and property was kept to a minimum.

At present, the Chinese Government is sparing no effort to resettle the people affected by the flood and has started reconstruction projects in the disaster areas. We are taking every measure possible, with full confidence, to ensure that there will be no famine and no widespread epidemic diseases in the wake of the natural disaster and that none of the pupils or students in the flood-hit areas will drop out from school or be deprived of education. In the course of reconstruction, we will carry forward the

great flood-fighting spirit in an all-round endeavour to push forward our reform and opening up and the socialist modernization drive.

Since China was hit by the disastrous floods, a number of countries and international organizations and communities have sent messages to express sympathy and solicitude, and rendered support and assistance to China. I wish to take this opportunity to extend, on behalf of the Chinese Government and people, our most sincere gratitude to them.

The world of today is a world of interdependence. The promotion of peace, cooperation and development has become the main trend of the times. Let us join hands and work together to bring into the twenty-first century a world of peace, security and stability in the interest of development.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, His Excellency Mr. Hubert Védrine, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Védrine (France) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election, which attests to the high regard in which the international community holds you and your country, and which France, as an old and true friend of Uruguay, welcomes. We hope that the work of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly will, under your presidency, lead to the strengthening of the Organization.

It was 53 years ago in San Francisco that we, "the peoples of the United Nations", decided to join our efforts

> "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person...to establish conditions under which justice...can be maintained, and to promote social progress".

That immense ambition was justified by the recent horrors, which at all costs were to be prevented from happening again — a necessary utopia, perhaps, or a superhuman task. But as the great French writer Albert Camus put it:

> "Superhuman tasks are the ones man takes a long time to accomplish, that's all."

A long time has elapsed, and we are still working on that, still toiling. We have no reason to be ashamed of what we have done as the United Nations throughout these 53 years, of what the Security Council and successive General Assemblies have done, as well as seven Secretaries-General — in particular the current one over the last two years, whose work has been so outstanding.

Over the decades, the Security Council, except when paralysed by abuse of the veto, has almost always managed to shoulder its primary responsibility for international security. When it failed to do so, no other institution was able to in its stead. Since its first peacekeeping operation 50 years ago, the Security Council has launched 49 operations of this kind.

The institutional framework established by the Charter has, in the most varied situations, ranging from cold war confrontation to the cooperation of recent years, proved its irreplaceable usefulness. This again was borne out in the spring of this year during the Iraqi crisis, when the Secretary-General was deservedly commended; in Africa, during the creation of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic, which was the first entirely new peacekeeping operation in four years; and even in the Balkans, where the difficult mission entrusted to the United Nations in Eastern Slavonia achieved its objective.

And yet, as the Secretary-General himself emphasized recently,

> "Unpredictability and surprise have become almost commonplace" *(A/53/1, para. 1)*,

and the illusions of the end of the cold war have not stood the test of reality. Our world, let us acknowledge this fact, is not moving towards greater harmony. Sometimes our interventions are not appropriate; some States take advantage of circumstances and deliberately carry out archaic policies of force that contravene the principles of the Charter. On other occasions, the abdication or implosion of States has released among various groups ancestral forms of hatred that are still very much alive, thus facilitating organized crime. All these are destabilizing factors which, while very different, all help to disorganize and imperil international relations.

Several major crises have proved this recently. The Asian financial crisis reminded us that strong growth, when badly regulated, is vulnerable in a globalized world that is all too often dependent on the ultra-sensitive

reactions of the trading floors and the increasingly rapid spread of contagious effects. Each day $1,600 billion is exchanged on the financial markets — huge sums of money that are greater than the means of intervention of all the financial institutions of the world. In 1970 those amounts were equal to the world's gross national product. Today, they are 15 times greater.

The nuclear tests in South Asia were a dramatic reminder that a very serious regional territorial dispute combined with a feeling, justified or not, of insecurity could open the way to nuclear and ballistic proliferation.

In East Africa, a typical armed conflict was born of a border dispute. In the Great Lakes region, six or seven States are in the grip of regional conflict on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Destabilization is threatening Central Asia, starting with Afghanistan. I cannot list them all, but currently more than 30 conflicts, civil wars or State break-ups are under way that involve more than 40 countries in their aftermath of suffering. Twenty-two million civilians — displaced persons and returnees — have been affected by these conflicts and require assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is currently active in 118 countries. Nor can I fail to mention child soldiers; slavery, which still goes on in a scarcely veiled form; disappeared persons; and so many other tragedies.

But I do not wish my statement to be a long litany of woe that is only too familiar to the United Nations, which is the first to learn of these situations. Is it not at this very moment trying to maintain peace on four continents with approximately 15,000 personnel engaged in about 17 operations? To cite just one example, no fewer than 20 agencies are trying to rebuild Bosnia.

Nor do I intend to neglect the progress achieved in 1998, which I mentioned at the beginning of my statement. I wish simply to explain that the United Nations and the multilateral system do not today have the necessary means to meet all these challenges. But we cannot and must not give up. How can we restore the necessary vigour to our action?

Allow me to make some suggestions in this area. First, we can preserve the powers that the Charter has given our institutions. The first priority is to reserve for the Security Council a monopoly on legitimate enforcement action in the case of "threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression".

Nothing can justify the use of force by a State, a group of States or an organization, however powerful, if prior authorization was not received from the Security Council — except in cases of self-defence.

My country shares the impatience of those who deplore the fact that it should take so long to find a solution to various cruel conflicts — for example, in Kosovo, where the humanitarian situation is so critical. Since November 1997 France has warned of the risks of explosion; it has put forward many proposals in liaison with Germany and its other partners in the Contact Group to prepare the ground for a realistic political solution. It has just begun action for the return of refugees. It has never ruled out the possible use of force. On this latter point, I hear voices urging us to forgo the authorization of the Security Council. But after this case there would be another exception, and then another. Little by little, any country would declare itself entitled to intervene wherever its interests, security or ambitions so required, and we would have to begin all over again. We must remain firm on this principle.

Second, we must make sure that the authority of the Security Council is respected and its resolutions are complied with. This goes for all its resolutions. But today the question arises particularly in connection with Iraq. The lifting of the oil embargo has, by the Council's resolutions, been made subject to the controlled dismantling of its weapons of mass destruction. Iraq must therefore meet these conditions — completely meet them, but only them. Once that objective is achieved, our aim must be to reintegrate Iraq into the international community, starting with the region.

The only way to achieve that end is by Iraq's complete compliance with the relevant resolutions — all the resolutions, nothing but the resolutions — which means Iraq's unreserved cooperation with the United Nations and the bodies empowered to monitor Iraq's disarmament.

The third need is to increase the representativeness of the Security Council in order to increase its legitimacy. This is why my country has come out in favour of enlarging the Security Council, with, on the one hand, new permanent members — two seats for the North, to which Germany and Japan have every claim, and three for the South; on the other hand, there should be new non-permanent members for the North and South. This enlargement must at the same time preserve the Council's effectiveness and not prevent it from carrying

out its responsibilities under the Charter. I hope this fifty-third session of the Assembly will see progress on this reform.

Fourth, we must increase the capacity of our Organization to prevent or settle regional crises. There is much to be done. Now that the international community has just commemorated on a melancholy note the fifth anniversary of the Oslo accords, what remains of the peace process in the Middle East and the hopes born in Madrid? There is no longer a light shining in the night, and the fires of hatred are gaining ground. France continues to support the persevering efforts of the United States Secretary of State, but we do not wish to be left without any prospects at all should those efforts unfortunately not succeed. That is why President Chirac and President Mubarak have proposed in that event convening a conference of countries resolved to save the peace. This concern for the future has been very well received. In liaison with Mr. Amre Moussa, we are working to further our proposal. We must not abandon the goal of meeting the aspirations of the peoples of this region for a just and lasting peace which respects the resolutions and agreements that have been reached.

Another region in crisis calls for our attention. As I mentioned earlier on the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo six or seven African States of the Great Lakes region are engaged in confrontation in a tangle of problems involving border issues, guerrilla activities, ethnic strife, refugees, the quest for arable land and so forth. It is illusory to hope for a separate settlement in each of these States. A regional crisis such as this calls for a regional solution. That is why my country has raised again the idea of a conference for peace in the Great Lakes region, which we suggested as early as 1995. The conference would be placed under the aegis of the United Nations or the Organization of African Unity, with the active participation of the States of the region. Several African diplomatic initiatives have the same goal. We support those efforts.

Africa is currently the theatre of other crises. Let us pay tribute to the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General's representatives. Here I salute in particular the memory of Maître Blondin Beye, who died while on a peace mission.

Fifth, there is a need to reinforce the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation system. Following the nuclear tests in South Asia, whose risks everyone recognizes, we must strengthen the anti-proliferation regime and pursue the disarmament process in all areas — nuclear, conventional, chemical and biological.

Our primary objective here should be the entry into force as speedily as possible of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. France, together with the United Kingdom, was the first nuclear-weapon State to ratify the Treaty and is the only one to have completed the dismantlement of its testing centre. I call on all States that have not yet done so to accede to this Treaty — including India and Pakistan, which have announced their intention not to carry out any more nuclear tests.

Another objective here would be a treaty banning the production of fissile material for military purposes. I proposed at the meeting of the five permanent members of the Security Council held in Geneva on 4 June last that we should launch such a negotiation. A universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable cut-off treaty would give new impetus to disarmament.

We should also pursue relentlessly the prohibition of chemical and biological weapons. Let us see to it that the Convention banning chemical weapons becomes universal and that the Convention banning biological weapons is made truly effective through a verification mechanism.

Combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction also means preventing the spread of vehicles capable of delivering such weapons, while preserving useful civilian applications.

In order to make progress in conventional disarmament, let us ensure that the Ottawa Convention providing for a comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines comes into force as soon as possible.

Sixth, we should continue to combat underdevelopment, whose link with crises needs no further demonstration. France remains heavily committed; it is the second largest provider of official development assistance. In order to modernize its aid and make it more effective, France has decided to reform its cooperation arrangements and increase coordination with other donors — in the first place with the European Union. More than 60 per cent of aid to Africa comes from the European Union. Europe is also the largest source of aid to Latin America and the second largest to Asia.

France would like development resources to be more predictable. The Secretary-General has made proposals

that we welcome in a constructive spirit, in particular the idea of a development account. We encourage the United Nations to continue its discussions in this area.

Seventh, we need to work with the non-governmental organizations. They are capable of sounding the alarm, making proposals and cooperating in very practical terms to help build States governed by the rule of law. Parallel to these actions, we expect much from the activities of Mrs. Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, both in the Commission on Human Rights and in the various United Nations agencies, which must also — all of them — integrate the human rights dimension into their activities.

After more than 10 years of negotiations, 1998 will see the adoption of the declaration on the defenders of human rights. This is a crucial text because these are the rights that dictatorships try to stifle and threaten.

However, even if we reinforce the Security Council, strengthen the hand of the Secretary-General and better handle future crises and other aspects of existing ones, this will still not be enough. We must regain the initiative, and for that we must extend our efforts to bring worldwide regulation to other fields. This brings me to my final points.

The eighth requirement is to extend the rule of law in all its aspects. The Statute of a permanent International Criminal Court was adopted in Rome after intensive negotiations. It is a major step forward in the fight against the impunity of the foremost criminals. France was one of the first to sign it. The Statute achieves an essential synthesis of the various legal traditions in the world and strikes a balance between the Court's competences and the powers of the Security Council that is in keeping with the spirit and calling of the United Nations. We hope that those countries that still have reservations will be able to join us.

In another field of law, the International Labour Organization has taken a historic step towards universal compliance with basic labour standards through the declaration adopted at its eighty-sixth conference, which is a commitment on the part of the 174 member States of the Organization.

On 11 November 1997 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization adopted the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights. This is the first normative framework to guide the international community in an area of scientific research where advances are already shaking our traditional concepts of life and social organization. France is submitting a draft resolution calling on the General Assembly to endorse this Universal Declaration.

Ninth, we must contain and reduce the scourge of organized crime, beginning with drugs. The volume of illegal drug trafficking now approaches $500 billion — 8 per cent to 10 per cent of world trade. According to the International Monetary Fund, money-laundering operations represent from 2 per cent to 5 per cent of global gross domestic product.

At the special session in New York in June we decided to put more emphasis on reducing the demand for drugs, in addition to what we have done about supply. Let us do so.

Tenth, we must combat terrorism in all its forms, whoever the perpetrators and whatever their motivation.

The recent International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings is an important step forward, but that is not enough. We must also acquire the means to hunt down those who finance and instigate these attacks. France is proposing the negotiation of a universal convention against the financing of terrorism.

We need to define concrete mechanisms for legal measures and mutual judicial assistance against those who finance terrorism. Effective sanctions, such as the seizure or the freezing of the assets of organizations or individuals that have participated in terrorist acts must be provided for. Innovative measures, such as making it impossible to invoke banking secrecy in judicial bodies investigating a terrorist attack, should be introduced. If we have the will to do this, we can launch this negotiation at the end of the present session of the General Assembly.

President Clinton spoke here on Monday of this common struggle as a shared obligation. This is correct. In addition, we need to attack the multiple causes that breed terrorism.

The eleventh point I would like to make concerns the remedy for not only the current financial crises, but also the malfunctioning of the international financial system as such. That is the issue here, as is shown by the increasing calls for a "new Bretton Woods". Financial globalization is running wild now. New means urgently need to be found. It is the responsibility of each State to

make its contribution. We need also to define new rules adapted to today's financial realities. My country is today presenting to its European partners some proposals to counter international financial instability.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) must naturally remain the pivot here. But the IMF must be more legitimate and more effective, working on the basis of clear, realistic, political and strategic guidelines, cooperating with other competent bodies, organizing dialogue between industrialized countries and emerging countries, ensuring the transparency of the financial system and reflecting the economic, social and political realities of partner countries — an IMF that can detect early warning signs to prevent crises from happening.

Within this transformation, to which the Director-General of the IMF is making an important contribution, and also in order better to stabilize the international economic and monetary situation and to support world growth, Europe will play an increasingly important role since it is finalizing the introduction of its single currency, the euro, and we are anticipating the benefits.

From this period we are living through, which is so full of contrasts, consisting of unprecedented progress and of crises threatening to wipe out our efforts, in particular those made under the aegis of the United Nations, additional progress must be forthcoming in building a more just and more peaceful world, because this is what we all want.

Today's world needs rules. The United Nations must remain the unifying framework, and the Charter must remain the reference point. Preserving what has proved its worth, adapting when necessary, inventing new forms of regulation — these are three main areas for our work.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, His Excellency Mr. Lamberto Dini, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Dini (Italy): I congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly, a sure guarantee of the success of the fifty-third session. At the same time, I wish to thank your predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his fine job in handling the difficult issues that arose last year.

On the broader issues facing the General Assembly in the year to come, Italy associates itself with and supports the statement made on Tuesday by the Foreign Minister of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Fewer than 10 years have gone by since the euphoric days that surrounded the fall of the Berlin Wall. As our decade began, "a new world order" was on everyone's lips. Many believed that we were at the threshold of a new age of stability, freedom and prosperity. In the ensuing years, we have indeed witnessed rapid growth in the world economy, but we have also seen an outbreak of new forms of nationalism, ethnic hostilities and acts of aggression.

Our peoples have grown apprehensive about the future as they watch the performance of the stock market, internal instability in various regions of the world, the failure of financial institutions, the rise and unpredictability of terrorism, unchecked waves of immigration, the constant flow of refugees and the resurgence of misplaced nuclear ambitions. In some countries, a few short months of crisis was all it took to wipe out the gains of an entire generation.

Such crises shed light on an improper balance between the power of the market and the power of institutions. Globalization and liberalization certainly have great merits. They have forced the national political classes to set public finances in order and to promote economic efficiency. But a global market requires some measure of global government built on the knowledge that the wealth of single States cannot be separated from the welfare of the international community, a government whose strength rests on the democracy of institutions. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan underlined in his speech, globalization requires good government.

This is why we urgently need to strengthen international leadership. The institutions are still not strong enough to provide such leadership, restore confidence, introduce change, stabilize the global economy, guarantee growth and protect the most vulnerable of us in the race towards development. Technology, communications and the market are progressing at a much faster pace than politics and institutions, thus creating a widening gap.

In the final years of this century, our challenge is to strengthen institutions and their capacity to coordinate the action of Governments. Globalization has impacts on ideologies and behaviour, societies and institutions. The opening of markets to competition must be accompanied by reaffirmed cooperation among the largest possible

number of States. The burden of responsibility falls on the shoulders of the stronger nations, particularly those of the G-7. They have a duty to show solidarity, transforming their privileges into benefits for all humanity.

The system of international institutions has the United Nations as its paramount and most authoritative benchmark. The United Nations must be the driving force behind a review of the network of interdependence. Like industrialization in its early days, globalization produces both great progress and dangerous imbalances. Thus, it requires governance. No one country can govern it, however great its political, economic and military power. Our century is drawing to a close with a revitalization of institutions upon which we can build the three pillars of stability: prosperity, security and respect for fundamental freedoms.

The first pillar of stability is governance of the economy to prevent crises from degenerating into catastrophes. The time has come to perfect the rules of conduct that guide the development of the global market. While these rules are imperfect and not always respected, we must assert the conviction that it is important and appropriate to observe them. This is the secret of their success. It is up to the economically stronger countries to guarantee continuity in the development of the market. They must be buyers, lenders and the final guarantors if we are to instil confidence and forestall the threat of a global recession. The forces that drive the global economy are the same as those that uphold the fundamental freedoms: the circulation of information and ideas; open borders and societies; the rule of law and individual rights. The challenges facing the economy are the same as those facing freedom.

At times, the markets are driven by a short-term logic that privileges the earnings of today over the growth of tomorrow. They conduct constant but instant referendums. The stock market does not always move at the same pace as the economy and society. Relentless technological progress can lead to the exclusion of many from the world of employment. Recent major economic and financial crises show that the market does not always grow when the State shrinks. Rather than enhancing freedom, sometimes it only increases the power of the strongest. It is a dangerous illusion to think the economic sphere can be unhinged from the political system, the social context and the history of nations. There can be no healthy economy without a strong State, without the rule of law, without social cohesiveness and protections — in other words, without respect for peoples or awareness of their history.

The market's supporters should not turn into the standard bearers for a new fundamentalism. The international financial institutions must know how to couple theory and practice, how to avoid strategies that damage society and destabilize the political system for the sake of defending the market. They must initiate policies and reforms that minimize moral hazards in their rescue operations. They must look at society as a whole and not just at its financial dimensions. Otherwise, some will rebel against or flee the market.

The United Nations and the international community can rely on the new cohesiveness of the European Union. The European currency, the Euro, demands new responsibilities at the international level as a repository of value and as an investment and reserve currency. It will allow the Union to project abroad standards that it would not otherwise be able to preserve, such as stability, competition and social solidarity. The European Union has no intention of hiding behind the shield of its currency. It has no illusions of being an oasis of prosperity sheltered from the tempests of the world.

The politicians of Europe are the first to have rethought the limits of national sovereignty. Today, the European Union, in the wake of the single currency, is about to become a political subject, and to participate as such in world leadership, to correct the fragility of the complex systems that govern the world. It is not enough to have strong national powers. For the European Union, too, the time has come to be a "leading nation". The time has come to further enhance the rules that have allowed us to unite the continent, banishing war within our borders.

To the South, Europe is facing massive waves of immigration. Europe is well aware of the needs that drive to its shores so many people trying to escape from suffocating demographic trends. Europe knows that the only solution is an ambitious policy of solidarity and development. Otherwise, like King Canute, it would be trying to hold back the sea with a wave of its hand.

Our cooperation policies must be revitalized to help close the gap between North and South. The Economic and Social Council, whose presidency will be assumed by Italy at the start of the coming year, can be instrumental in eradicating poverty and harmonizing the differences between and the needs of the two hemispheres.

Renewed institutions will also have to manage the second pillar of stability: security. Here, too, the United

Nations must play a central role. I refer not only to its traditional role of direct involvement in peacekeeping operations. Italy, I would underline, continues to provide a strong logistic base, as well as men and resources, for such missions and has long proposed ways to make these operations more efficient and effective.

I refer also to the novelty of the future: growing relations with other institutions, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to which the transatlantic community entrusts its defence. The Atlantic Alliance is redefining its strategies, missions and membership, but it is also rethinking its relations with the United Nations in a new spirit. It is looking to the United Nations for additional legitimacy to broaden the scope of its mission. This is another crucial aspect of the system of institutions that can guarantee peace and stability and on which we must build our future.

Peace is also jeopardized by resurgent temptations to brandish nuclear weapons in an effort to restore regional balances, enhance national prestige and consolidate national unity. While such goals can be in themselves legitimate, they become totally illusory if entrusted to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, instruments that threaten the very right to life. In the framework of institutional strengthening, we must, as a matter of priority, root out senseless ambitions that rely on lethal weapons. We must aim instead to complete the non-proliferation regime and make it more effective and more universal.

Security is jeopardized by a breed of terrorism that has become more and more irrational, threatening fragile peace processes, privatizing terror and directing its hatred mostly, but not exclusively, against the Western world and the values it represents. We must therefore redouble our common efforts to fight this scourge.

Individual rights are the third component of institutional strengthening, along with prosperity and security. The market and fundamental freedoms, as we increasingly discover, are two sides of the same coin. But human rights are likely to remain abstract or illusory if the United Nations cannot enforce them to the benefit of all individuals and, if necessary, also against their Governments.

The international community, and all of us individually, must deepen our commitment to safeguard these rights. The measure of our civilization is the protection we afford to the weakest and most vulnerable social groups. I am thinking first of children who are victims of atrocities whose true dimensions the media is only now beginning to expose.

The Rome Statute to establish the International Criminal Court represents what is probably the greatest institutional advancement since the San Francisco Charter. In this field, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, it confers certainty and universality on the Charter's system of values. But here, too, we must complete our journey. Therefore, I urge those countries that have not yet done so — and they are the majority — to sign the Statute and to start to move towards prompt ratification.

The core of every reform touches on the Security Council. It is not enough to strengthen institutions: we must make them more democratic and representative. And it is on the concepts of democracy and representation that the debate over the future of the Security Council pivots.

Significant progress has been made in recent months in identifying measures aimed at improving the transparency and the working methods of the Security Council: greater openness of informal consultations; more involvement of countries that contribute troops to peacekeeping operations and multilateral forces; more prompt and detailed briefings on the Council's activities by the President-in-office; and ready availability of texts and documents being examined by the Council.

But the stalemate continues on the issue of enlarging the Council. The Italian Government will be willing to support any reasonable formula, provided that it does not prejudice the eventual establishment of a common European seat on the Council, distance Italy from the other principal industrial countries or increase the number of countries that are "more equal" than others, transforming the majority of Member States from protagonists into mere spectators.

The essential problem is one of principles and criteria. Italy has made and will continue to make an active contribution to this question that is of fundamental importance to international peace and stability. It will continue to fight for a more democratic, efficient and geographically representative Security Council. No one should feel excluded. Every country, no matter how large or small, has a contribution to make, an experience to share.

Given the current stalemate over increasing the number of permanent members, we wonder whether it would not make more sense to concentrate for the time being only on an increase in non-permanent seats. The solution of increasing the number of elective seats for every regional group would make it easier for all Member States to have access to the Security Council. After all, this is the same solution that was adopted in 1963, when the only previous enlargement of the Council took place.

As to the method we should follow to get there, we believe that on a matter of such crucial importance it is essential that any decision with Charter amendment implications should be adopted by a majority of two thirds of all Member States, as prescribed by Article 108 of the Charter.

These are some of our suggestions for the "quiet revolution" of the United Nations, to which Secretary-General Kofi Annan has dedicated such passion. We are grateful to him for his efforts.

The century that is about to end has taught that there are no definitive and total solutions. Although the institutions are imperfect, they are flexible instruments. It is our high duty to improve them so that they can become the visible hand of stability, together with the invisible hand of the market. Institutions are the only truly indispensable power.

Mr. Ba-Jammal (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency The Honourable Rashid Abdullah Al-Noaimi.

Mr. Al-Noaimi (United Arab Emirates): I have the honour to extend to the President the congratulations of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. We are confident that his wise leadership and vast diplomatic experience in international affairs will contribute to strengthening the role of the Organization in the world today.

I also wish to pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, for the distinguished manner in which he directed the work of the previous session. We also wish to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his endeavours to maintain peace, security and stability in the world.

As we stand at the threshold of a new millennium, the international community is witnessing radical changes in international relations, the implications of which are reflected in the lives of peoples. The various aspects of openness and globalization embodied in some of those changes have not been comprehensive in their positive aspects, but have resulted in widely divergent levels of economic and social development among States and have promoted the emergence of new patterns of problems that require radical joint international solutions to contain and deal with them.

There is now an increased awareness in the world of the inevitability of renewing and developing the United Nations as the essential international tool for dealing with current world problems and achieving balance, transparency and justice in international relations.

Consequently, we support the positions of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 regarding these vital issues, particularly the questions within the purview of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, and the reform of the Security Council and enlargement of its membership. We also call for strengthening coordination, cooperation and dialogue between the United Nations and regional organizations in order to mobilize and complement joint international efforts to deal with many issues on the agenda.

The world has seen positive efforts in the area of international law, the most important of which were reflected in the conclusion of a number of international conventions. The latest of these efforts was the establishment in Rome of an International Criminal Court, which we regard as an important step that will contribute to supporting the principles of human rights worldwide. We also call for reactivating the role of the International Court of Justice, which is the essential legal instrument for settling disputes between States.

Political events in the world, and particularly in the Arab Gulf region, have proved that radical solutions to regional disputes can only be achieved through peaceful means and methods based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Proceeding from this belief, and true to those principles, the United Arab Emirates has adopted a wise policy in its quest for a peaceful solution to the question of the occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran of its three islands —

Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa — which form an integral part of our national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The continued consolidation by Iran of its illegal occupation of those islands and the imposition of a policy of *fait accompli* through numerous military and civilian measures designed to change their historical, demographic and legal characteristics are a source of grave tension and concern in the region. This runs counter to good-neighbourly relations, peaceful coexistence and confidence-building, as well as to the Charters of both the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Such actions are also incompatible with the approaches taken by the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which call for the settlement of existing disputes by peaceful means in order to achieve permanent security and stability in the region and strengthen relations and common interests between the States members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran.

Accordingly, once again from this rostrum we appeal to the Government of friendly Iran to demonstrate a serious political will and accept our genuinely peaceful initiative, supported by all fraternal and friendly States, either to engage with us in dialogue and enter into bilateral negotiations that would address the legal and historical background of this question, not just its formalities, or accept resort to the International Court of Justice with a view to reaching a just and permanent settlement conducive to terminating the Iranian occupation of our three islands. Once again we reaffirm that our call for solving this dispute peacefully emanates from the nature of our historical relations with Iran and proceeds from our commitment to the essential principles governing international relations. This is also in the interest of preserving peace, security and stability in our region and throughout the world.

The United Arab Emirates renews its support for all peaceful efforts and endeavours by the Secretary-General of the United Nations towards resumption of the activities of the Special Commission in Iraq. But we consider it necessary, in order to avoid any further escalation or renewed tensions in the region, and in the light of the importance of preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and non-interference in its international affairs, to continue upgrading the food-for-oil programme and improving its operation in order to meet the humanitarian needs of the fraternal Iraqi people and to alleviate its ceaseless suffering. At the same time, we urge the Iraqi Government to fully implement all the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy particularly those relating to the release of the prisoners of war and detainees, citizens of sisterly Kuwait and other States, and to complete the restitution of Kuwaiti property so as to ensure the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Iraq and to enable it to resume its natural role at the regional and international levels.

The Middle East peace process is at a dangerous stalemate on all its tracks as a result of the adoption by the Israeli Government of a policy of gradual recanting on all the obligations and undertakings it has assumed under this process. The most dangerous aspect of that policy is that Government's resolve to proceed with implementing its plans for building more Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, particularly in the city of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan. It daily perpetrates atrocious and inhuman crimes against the Palestinian and other Arab peoples, which constitutes a flagrant violation of the basic principles on which that process and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are based.

Aware of the danger inherent in the continuation of these illegal Israeli acts, we believe there is a need for effective action by the international community — in particular, the co-sponsors of the peace process and the European Union — to bring additional pressure to bear on Israel to force it to comply with its legal obligations and to demand that it resume the negotiations, without preconditions, on the different tracks of the peace process, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. We also express our unceasing support for the Palestinian people in their quest for self-determination and their legitimate aspiration to establish their independent State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital. Similarly, we support the position of the Government of Lebanon, demanding that Israel implement fully Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which calls on Israel to end unconditionally its military occupation of the south of Lebanon and its western Bekaa valley without condition.

The establishment of a zone free of all kinds of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and Arab Gulf regions is a requirement that complements the peace process and represents an essential factor in the security and stability of those regions. Accordingly, the international community should demand that the Government of Israel accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and subject its

nuclear installations to the control and safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency. International measures which so far have been achieved in the area of world disarmament have not been global in their coverage, especially since we are witnessing an arms race and testing of nuclear and other proscribed weapons. Such developments will not lead to the settlement of existing disputes between States, but, rather, to an imbalance in regional security, as is the case between India and Pakistan and in other regions.

We therefore urge both friendly countries to exercise self-restraint, renounce the use of force and resume dialogue and negotiations with a view to reducing tensions and solving their current disputes peacefully in a manner that will serve the interests of security and stability in that region. We also call upon the nuclear-weapon States, and those in possession of such dangerous weapons, to reconsider their policies, to refrain from applying double standards and to promote the adoption of equal measures for confidence-building among States. Serious steps must be taken by the United Nations to deal with this shortcoming in a way that contributes to the creation of a peaceful and stable world free from tension and from the threat or use of such prohibited weapons and their damaging effects on humanity.

While we appreciate the efforts of the United Nations peacekeeping forces, in cooperation with the regional organizations, to deal with and contain conflicts and civil and regional wars in certain parts of the world, we are still concerned about the failure to contain several crises in other parts of the world, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, the Great Lakes region, Angola and other hotbeds of tension. Recent examples are the situations between Ethiopia and Eritrea and between Iran and Afghanistan, as well as that in Kosovo, where the human rights of Muslims are being flagrantly violated by the Yugoslav Serb forces, whose actions we strongly condemn as contradicting legally binding international norms and principles. The United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, must assume their responsibilities in putting an end to such conflicts and violations and should promote the participation of regional organizations in finding adequate peaceful solutions to those problems. We also call upon the parties concerned to cooperate in such efforts by demonstrating the political will necessary to settle their disputes by peaceful means.

The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns the terrorist acts that were carried out recently in some African States, resulting in heavy losses of lives and property. On the basis of ethical and humanitarian responsibility, the international community should intensify its efforts to protect civilians and their rights and to confront the phenomenon of terrorism, regardless of its origin or form. However, combating this dangerous phenomenon should not be carried out on a unilateral basis or through indiscriminate military revenge, which destroys lives and property, but through joint international action within the framework of the United Nations in order to ensure the elimination of all the root causes and manifestations of terrorism and thereby preserve the security and stability of societies and the territorial integrity of States.

The world economic and financial environment continues to undergo numerous challenges which have varying implications for development. Despite the liberalization of trade, the open markets and the globalization of the economy that have characterized international relations, developing countries, representing a majority of the population of this planet, are still facing a multitude of problems especially together with the exacerbation of unemployment, illiteracy and poverty, in addition to debts and the cost of servicing them, declining humanitarian and development assistance which have become a heavy burden on many of those States, particularly the least developed countries. As a result, their development problems have increased, and that in turn has led to the creation of a state of instability and social disintegration.

Recent economic and financial crises in South-East Asia and other regions not only pose challenges to sustainable development, but also demonstrate that there are clear imbalances in the world monetary, economic and trade systems. Therefore, we call for the development of global economic and financial strategies to remedy the real causes of this phenomenon in order to achieve stability in the world financial, economic and trade systems. This will also require the reform of international development and financial institutions to enable them to adapt to the changing economic situation in the world and effectively contribute to addressing many of those problems. That in turn will require the initiation of comprehensive and objective North-South dialogue, which should lead to the fulfilment of the goals shared by both the developing and developed countries.

In conclusion, I hope that the deliberations of the Assembly at this session will succeed in reaching positive resolutions that address our concerns as they are reflected on the agenda for this session for the benefit, prosperity, security and stability of our States and peoples.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, His Excellency Mr. Jean-Charles Okoto Lolakombe.

Mr. Okoto Lolakombe (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*interpretation from French*): I should like first of all to carry out the noble duty of adding my voice to those who have spoken before me from this rostrum in congratulating Mr. Didier Opertti on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third regular session. I am convinced that with the effective cooperation of the elected members of his Bureau, he will spare no effort to ensure the success of our work.

I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for the skill with which he so honourably discharged his weighty responsibilities as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session.

The fifty-third session of the General Assembly is taking place at a time when my country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the victim of armed aggression by its neighbours, Rwanda and Uganda, that has been taking place since 2 August. The seriousness of the actions of these two invading countries, which are States parties to the noble ideals of the charters of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity (OUA), obliges me to dwell at length on this dispute in the hope of helping the Assembly understand better the drama that is currently taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, my dear homeland.

In order to enable the Assembly better to understand this war and all of its consequences, a brief reminder of the facts is necessary.

On 27 July 1998, the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mzee Laurent-Désiré Kabila, after consultations with his Rwandan and Ugandan counterparts took the sovereign decision to terminate Rwanda's military and technical cooperation and to put an end to the presence of foreign troops throughout the national territory.

When Rwanda's troops left Congolese territory, it was noticed that certain Tutsis of Rwandan origin, called Banyamulenge, followed suit.

A week later, Congolese towns bordering on Rwanda — Goma, Bukavu and Uvira — were seized by armed elements that came from that neighbouring country.

On 6 August, aircraft started shuttling between Goma and Kitona, in the west of the country, via Kigali, over a distance of more than 2000 kilometres. After one of the civilian pilots was killed for refusing to carry out orders, these aircraft were diverted from Goma airport to transport troops and *matériel* the west, under the direction of Mr. James Kabarehe, the ex-Chief of Staff of the Congo.

At the same time, columns of armoured vehicles and other military equipment crossed the border from Uganda under the pretext of defending Ugandan interests in the Congo.

Despite the protests of the Congolese Government, which demanded their immediate withdrawal, Ugandan troops surrounded the town of Bunia in the eastern part of the country on 13 August 1998.

On the same day, the Inga hydroelectric dam was occupied by the Rwandan-Ugandan coalition forces. They sabotaged the installations in order to deprive the capital, Kinshasa, of electricity and drinking water.

On 23 August 1998, Ugandan troops attacked Kisangani, in the north-eastern part of the country, and later occupied it.

These facts, and these acts of violence — confirmed by independent sources — provide ample proof of the aggressive involvement of Kigali and Kampala in the huge plot to Balkanize the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all in defiance of international law and the principle of the inviolability of borders inherited from the colonial period, pursuant to the Charter of the Organization of African Unity.

Indeed, one of the two aggressor countries, Uganda, made no bones about admitting publicly that its troops occupied certain positions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As can be seen, what some media sources wrongly described as a rebellion from the east was simply a shameful plot to destabilize my country politically and economically, and the covetous intentions of Rwanda and Uganda regarding my country's many natural resources were barely concealed.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is once again paying a high price for this war imposed on it from the outside. Among the countless examples are the

massacres of thousands of innocent Congolese, including members of religious orders, women, children and elderly people in the east and in the west. These sordid crimes remind us of the killing of Hutu refugees by elements of the same Rwandan Patriotic Army. Further examples include the massive deportations from Kivu towards Rwanda of people whose fate remains unknown; the summary executions of prisoners of war; the dismantling, sabotage and destruction of the industrial, shipping and economic infrastructure of the country, damage which, to date, has been estimated at about $3 billion for Matadi alone; the more than three-week cut in the provision of electric power and water to the capital, Kinshasa, a city of more than 6 million people, which was a real humanitarian tragedy, as is illustrated by the fact that large stocks of fresh foodstuffs were declared unfit for consumption; reports of countless deaths in the hospitals because doctors were unable to work in the conditions required by their noble profession; and the postponement, *sine die*, of the polio vaccination campaign mandated by the World Health Organization, with untold consequences on the lives of our children, which gravely compromises the future of our country.

Despite the situation of aggression, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is a peace-loving nation that respects international conventions reaffirms its commitment to the principles of the Charter and its unshakeable faith in the promotion of a culture of peace in the Great Lakes region.

The first manifestation of this ideal was demonstrated by the Government when it appealed to the Security Council and the Secretary-General to obtain the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces.

Unfortunately, the reaction of the international community did not match the gravity of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even one of the most important bodies in the United Nations system — the Security Council — after much procrastination, merely issued a few ambiguous statements calling for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of foreign troops without, unfortunately, specifying them by name. On the other hand, in similar cases — in Kosovo, in Bosnia and in Kuwait — the Security Council dealt with the situation promptly and practically to restore peace. Why was there this silence from the international community, particularly from Security Council? The Council's policy of double standards on this issue could set an unfortunate precedent that could seriously undermine the credibility of the United Nations and wipe out the reform efforts under way.

Given this situation that does no credit to our community, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, mindful of its heavy responsibilities to guarantee the territorial integrity of the country, was obliged to resort to an armed response to put an end to the invasion. Pursuant to Article 51 of the Charter, the Democratic Republic of the Congo appealed to its allies to deal with Ugandan-Rwandan aggression.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in particular, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, which responded to our appeal. I would also like to pay tribute to the valiant Congolese people, who undertook to defend their homeland when it was under attack. I am also grateful to Belgium, which had the courage to publicly condemn a country in the Great Lakes region that was involved in this act of aggression, and to Ms. Colette Braeckman, who had the courage to denounce the plot against my country, as well as Chad, Gabon and many other African countries that publicly demonstrated their support and denounced this aggression.

The Assembly will agree with me that no honourable nation can allow its sovereignty and territorial integrity to be called into question. The Congolese people will never accept subjugation, oppression or the imposition of perverse values such as a cultural genocide, which is so blithely tolerated by certain States.

The International Criminal Court whose Statute was signed recently in Rome should get down to work and immediately prosecute those who seek the destruction of human beings but who cover up their actions by making innocent people take the blame.

The failure of the various appeals for a ceasefire cannot be blamed on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is rather the result of the obstinacy, bad faith and cynicism of Rwanda and Uganda during the negotiations held in Victoria Falls and in Addis Ababa.

Since the first summit, held at Victoria Falls last August, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has indicated that implementation of the ceasefire was contingent on the immediate, unconditional withdrawal from our national territory of foreign troops not invited by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I believe that the General Assembly and the Security Council are obligated properly to implement the relevant provisions of the Charter, in particular those of

Chapter VII, which envision action by the world Organization with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.

Despite the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, our Government continues to abide by the timetable leading to the democratization of our political life. In that connection, I wish to inform the Assembly that on 22 September 1998 our head of State signed Law 122, relating to the organization and exercise of power in my country. The new law grants the Constitutional Commission prerogatives allocated to the Constituent Assembly, finalizing the draft constitution to be the subject of a referendum that will be organized early in 1999.

I reassure the international community that my country has noble aspirations and to date has granted no material or military support whatsoever to the former Rwandese Armed Forces, to the Interahamwe extremists, or much less to the Front pour la défense de la démocratie, contrary to the campaign of slander and incitement waged by aggressors wishing to absolve themselves of the massacre of more than a thousand people in and around Kasika.

I cannot conclude without speaking of the rebuilding of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in particular and of the need for socio-economic development in Africa in general; the continent continues to face crises of all kinds and is trying in vain to meet the challenge of recovery. In this context, the role of the United Nations should not be limited to accompanying Africa in implementing measures that have been or will be adopted. Through capacity-building, the United Nations system must translate into fact the organic partnership between itself and the Organization of African Unity.

In the case of my country, the war imposed upon it by its neighbours has destroyed what remained of its economic fabric, which had long suffered from the economic mismanagement of the former dictatorship. That is why I appeal urgently to the United Nations and more specifically to the "Friends of the Congo" — which at the Brussels conference decided to provide the assistance needed to rebuild the Democratic Republic of the Congo — to contribute to the trust fund established for that purpose, with a view to helping in the economic recovery and the rebuilding of my country.

I wish in conclusion to say that my country would appreciate enormously any action that the United Nations might consider to prevail upon the Rwandese Republic to sign the non-aggression pact among the members of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, and to establish democracy in Rwanda and Uganda. For all my country's problems are repercussions of the policy of non-democratization in Rwanda and in Uganda. The international community would thus be performing a useful task.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.